

Ministry of Health

Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) Fact Sheet

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This fact sheet provides basic information only. It is not intended to provide or replace medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. You should talk to a health care professional about health concerns and illness.

Respiratory Syncytial Virus

Respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is a major cause of lower respiratory illness affecting the lungs and airways, particularly among infants, young children, and older adults. RSV often causes cold-like symptoms and is the most common cause of bronchiolitis, a chest infection that affects infants and toddlers.

Individuals are most likely to catch RSV when the virus is most active. The RSV season in Canada is generally from November to April.

Signs and Symptoms of RSV

While most people with an RSV infection will experience mild illness, some individuals may develop severe infections. This is especially true for infants, young children, and older adults.

Symptoms of RSV are similar to those of the cold or flu, including:

- coughing
- runny nose
- fever
- wheezing
- decrease in appetite and energy
- irritability in children

Given these are common symptoms, it is easy to mistake RSV for other respiratory illness, such as the flu or COVID-19. . It is not possible to differentiate between respiratory viruses based on symptoms alone. While RSV typically causes mild symptoms that last a few days and do not require medical attention, some people can become very sick. Go to an emergency department if someone:

- Has trouble breathing (working hard to breathe, breathing faster than normal, pale skin, lips that look white or blue, asthma or wheezing),
- Has any of the following symptoms:
 - fever and is very sleepy or difficult to wake
 - repeated vomiting and unable to keep any liquids down for eight hours or more
 - vomiting or diarrhea containing a large amount of blood
 - signs of dehydration with dry mouth or no urination for eight hours or more
- Is experiencing worsening symptoms.

How to Care for Someone with RSV

Here are some tips for managing fever and discomfort from RSV symptoms:

- Use over-the-counter medications, such as acetaminophen or ibuprofen, for fever and pain. Do not give ibuprofen to infants under six months old without first speaking to a health care provider. Never give aspirin to children.
- Drink enough fluids to help prevent dehydration (loss of body fluids). If your baby is having trouble drinking, try clearing nasal congestion with a bulb syringe or saline (salt water) nose drops.
- A lukewarm bath or wet face cloths will not change someone's body temperature but may help them feel more comfortable. Avoid cold baths because they can make the person shiver, which raises their temperature. Do not use alcohol baths or rubs to lower a fever.
- Dress in light clothing to allow the body to cool down and help increase comfort. If the person starts to shiver, add warmer clothing. Remove them when the shivering stops.

Talk to a health care provider:

- before combining natural or herbal supplements with medicine, as some of the ingredients may interact.
- about choosing the right medicine to treat RSV symptoms, as some over-the-counter cough and cold medicines contain ingredients that may be unsafe for children.

How to Help Protect Yourself and Others from RSV

You can help prevent the spread of RSV and other respiratory viruses by:

- staying home if you or someone you're caring for is sick until you/they have no fever and symptoms and have been improving for at least 24 hours (or 48 hours if there was nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea)

- washing your hands often
- covering your mouth when you cough or sneeze
- regularly cleaning high touch surfaces
- improving ventilation in your home, such as leaving interior doors open, using bathroom and kitchen fans, keeping baseboards and heating vents clear, opening windows and doors when the weather permits, and ensuring that heating and air conditioning systems are maintained and serviced.
- consider wearing a tight-fitting, well-constructed mask in indoor public settings, especially if you are at higher risk of severe infection
- breastfeeding your baby, if possible. Breast milk contains antibodies and other immune factors that help prevent and fight off illness
- avoiding smoke from tobacco and cannabis products

Protecting Older Adults and Infants from RSV: Understanding Your Options

- **Older Adults RSV prevention**

Two vaccine products are available for older adults aged 60 years or older: Arexvy and Abrysvo™. **Ontario's publicly funded RSV prevention program for older adults targets high-risk individuals and settings.** Please see the ministry's [RSV website](#) or speak with a health care provider for more information.

Studies have shown that both vaccines offer multi-year protection against lower respiratory illness caused by RSV. As such, **if an individual received a dose of RSV vaccine during the 2023–2024 season, they do not need to receive another dose this season.**

- **Infant RSV prevention**

Two safe and effective ways to help prevent RSV infections in most infants and high-risk children are available: vaccination during pregnancy and monoclonal antibodies given to the baby after birth. Using both the vaccine and the monoclonal antibody is not necessary. Please see the ministry's [RSV website](#) and speak with a health care provider for more information.

Additional Information

For more information about RSV, RSV prevention products, or the province's RSV prevention program, please refer to the ministry's [RSV website](#) or contact your local public health unit. You may also contact a primary health care provider.